



## SCENARIO 14

### STEVEN AND HIS KNIFE

#### STANDARD 5

A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.

In Scenario 14, the reader will be exposed to the behavior of two leaders, both faced with making decisions that involve school policy. The decisions with which they are confronted relate to the educational success of students functioning in a safe teaching and learning environment. The issues of the scenario are imbedded in communication, ethical practices, and using the influence of one's office constructively and productively in the service of all students and their families. The reader will want to note the possible consequences that can befall a leader who becomes overly sensitive to the needs of students and does not follow procedures.

#### ISLLC Standards Indicators Exhibited in Scenario 14

##### Knowledge Indicators

The administrator has knowledge and understanding of:

- ▲ The purpose of education and the role of leadership in modern society
- ▲ Professional codes of ethics
- ▲ Legal issues impacting school operations
- ▲ The law as related to education and schooling
- ▲ Principles and issues relating to school safety and security
- ▲ Student growth and development
- ▲ Applied motivational theories
- ▲ Information sources, data collection, and data analysis strategies
- ▲ Effective communication
- ▲ Emerging issues and trends that potentially impact the school community
- ▲ Various ethical frameworks and perspectives on ethics
- ▲ Global issues and forces affecting teaching and learning

##### Disposition Indicators

The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to:

- ▲ Ensuring that students have the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become successful adults
- ▲ The ideal of the common good
- ▲ Using the influence of one's office constructively and productively in the service of all students and families
- ▲ Student learning as the fundamental purpose of schooling
- ▲ The variety of ways in which students can learn
- ▲ A safe and supportive learning environment
- ▲ Subordinating one's own interests to the good of the school community
- ▲ Bringing ethical principles to the decision-making process
- ▲ The right of every student to a free, quality education
- ▲ Collaboration and communication with families
- ▲ High-quality standards, expectations, and performances

- ▲ Involvement of families and other stakeholders in school decision-making processes

- ▲ Families as partners in the education of their children
- ▲ The proposition that families have the best interests of their children in mind
- ▲ Accepting the consequences for upholding one's principles and actions
- ▲ Recognizing a variety of ideas, values, and cultures
- ▲ Accepting responsibility
- ▲ Development of a caring school community

##### Performance Indicators

The administrator facilitates and engages in activities ensuring that:

- ▲ Lines of communication are developed with decision makers outside the school community
- ▲ The environment in which schools operate is influenced on behalf of students and their families
- ▲ Effective problem-framing and problem-solving skills are used
- ▲ A variety of sources of information are used to make decisions
- ▲ Problems are confronted and resolved in a timely manner
- ▲ Stakeholders are involved in decisions affecting schools
- ▲ Potential problems and opportunities are identified
- ▲ Pupil personnel programs are developed to meet the needs of students and their families
- ▲ Barriers to student learning are identified, clarified, and addressed
- ▲ Effective communication skills are used
- ▲ There is a culture of high expectations for self, student, and staff performance
- ▲ Community youth family services are integrated with school programs
- ▲ The school and community serve one another as resources
- ▲ Public policy is shaped to provide quality education for students

##### The administrator

- ▲ Demonstrates appreciation for and sensitivity to the diversity in the school community
- ▲ Serves as a role model
- ▲ Demonstrates values, beliefs, and attitudes that inspire others to higher levels of performance
- ▲ Considers the impact of one's administrative practices on others
- ▲ Examines personal and professional values
- ▲ Fulfills legal and contractual obligations
- ▲ Applies laws and procedures fairly, wisely, and considerately
- ▲ Demonstrates a personal and professional code of ethics
- ▲ Accepts responsibility for school operations
- ▲ Treats people fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect

Steven is a seventh grader at Harrison Middle School. He lives with his grandmother and two younger brothers. His grades are below average, and he is often sent to the principal's office for behavior problems. Steven has missed 20 days of school, and it is only the beginning of the second semester. His grandmother has been called several times because she is listed on school records as Steven's legal guardian. Steven's mother has recently made two trips to the school for conferences with the principal. In each of these conferences, she suggested that school personnel did not provide Steven with the assistance he needed to be successful. She also requested that the principal contact her when there was a problem with Steven.



On Wednesday afternoon during his math class, Steven was showing off a knife to some of his classmates. It caused such a disruption that the teacher, Mrs. Adams, went to the back of the room to find the cause of the commotion. She saw the knife and immediately asked Steven to hand it over to her. He gave her the knife, and they proceeded to the principal's office.

Mrs. Adams explained the incident involving Steven to the principal. She stated that he had confiscated the weapon and immediately brought Steven to the office because he knew the school had a zero tolerance policy regarding weapons on school premises. Mr. Jordan (principal) excused Mrs. Adams and proceeded to talk with Steven about the incident. Steven explained that he was not going to hurt anyone. Rather, he said he had found the knife, thought it was cool, and wanted to show it off to his friends. Mr. Jordan explained to Steven that the school had a zero tolerance policy regarding weapons on school property and asked if he were aware of that policy. Steven said that he was aware and understood that he would be punished. Mr. Jordan, having addressed situations of this nature on several previous occasions, believed that he knew when students were really troublemakers. He looked at Steven, advised him that he had two weeks of detention, and sent him back to class.

During the next two hours, Mr. Jordan tried to contact Steven's mother three times but was unable to do so. Steven's mother was extremely hard to reach, for she worked two jobs and was seldom home. Had he been able to contact her, his plans were to ask her if she were aware that her son was carrying a weapon and had the weapon in school. It was also Mr. Jordan's intention to ask her if she had given him permission to possess the knife. Mr. Jordan was never able to reach Steven's mother.

At the end of the school day, Mr. Jordan held a second conference with Steven. After this conference, he felt that Steven really understood the policy and did not have bad intentions. Mr. Jordan placed the knife in a box on his desk and explained to Steven that if he were ever caught on school property with a weapon again, the zero tolerance policy would be applied, and he would receive severe punishment. Steven nodded in agreement, said that he understood and that he would never bring a weapon to school again.

Just as the conference was concluding, Mr. Jordan's secretary called him to speak with a parent who had been waiting for some time. In a rush to meet with the parent, he did not notice that Steven lifted the knife from the box on his desk.

During his walk home from school, Steven got into a fight with Bob, a classmate. It started out as name calling, but then became physical. During the course of the fight, Steven stabbed Bob with the knife. Bob was not killed but did suffer serious injuries. His family pressed charges, and Steven was taken to the juvenile detention center.

The same afternoon, after receiving the news from a number of sources, Superintendent Walker asked Principal Jordan to meet with him in his office. However, before Mr. Jordan arrived, Superintendent Walker received several calls from the news media, board of education members, and parents. The calls all contained a large outcry for disciplinary action against Mr. Jordan. In between calls, Superintendent Walker reviewed the outstanding record of Principal Jordan and discussed the board's policies on student discipline, attendance, and administrative personnel procedures with the Directors of Student Services and Human Resources. All policies were clear, and even though the board had a zero tolerance policy regarding weapons on school premises, action regarding personnel who failed to implement the policy was at the discretion of the superintendent.

When Mr. Jordan reached the office of the superintendent, he provided Superintendent Walker with a full explanation of what had occurred. The superintendent listened, seemed satisfied, and said to Mr. Jordan, "I will review the matter and meet with you again within the next several days." As Mr. Jordan was about to leave the superintendent's office, three additional calls were received. After completing the third call, Superintendent Walker turned to Mr. Jordan, advised him that he was on suspension with pay and was not to return to Harrison until further notice.

## REFLECTIVE THINKING AND SCENARIO ANALYSIS

1. From the scenario, cite factors that would support the notion that the disposition of Principal Jordan influenced or did not influence the quality of his decision. Specifically identify the ISLLC Standards indicators in the content of the scenario.
2. What are some of the critical decision factors that appear not to have been considered by Principal Jordan?
3. Which of the decision-making models described in this chapter would least likely produce the outcome described in the scenario?
4. Is there ever a time when a principal is justified in exercising flexibility in the implementation of school policy? Provide a rationale for your response.
5. One of the ISLLC indicators states, "Families should function as partners in the education of their children." Subscribing to this indicator, what was the appropriate action for Principal Jordan to take? Justify your response.
6. In what manner did each of the school leaders allow the power of his position to influence the decision he made? What influences impacted the decisions, their quality, and acceptance?
7. Who is likely to be liable in a situation of this nature and why?